

**PHASE ONE FINAL REPORT  
FOR  
HUNTSVILLE-MADISON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA**

**MADISON PUBLIC LIBRARY STUDY  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**Submitted by**



*transforming the library experience*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Huntsville-Madison County Public Library engaged Providence Associates (the Consultant) to assist them with planning for the redesign of an expanded Madison Public Library (the Library). The focus of the first phase of the project was to work with the Library to develop a community vision for the expanded library. The Consultant's approach consisted of three phases: Discovery, Community Input, and Findings and Recommendations.

## **DISCOVERY: DATA GATHERING ACTIVITIES**

Prior to visiting the Library, the Consultant gathered and reviewed documents relevant to the project. These documents included:

- community demographics;
- a list of Facility Upgrade Needs developed by the client;
- a Building and Resources Scan provided by the Consultant and completed by the Client; and
- the results of a community survey conducted in October 2013.

According to the demographic information gathered, Madison is a young community; i.e. younger than the U.S. average. Its residents are highly educated, with a large percentage holding college degrees. There is a high level of owner-occupied homes, and a lower-than-average percentage of single-parent households. Median household income is higher than the U.S. average.

The Building and Resources Scan gave the Consultant information on the Library's collection, staffing, hours and technological resources, as well as an assessment of the facility. In general, the Scan demonstrated that the community has outgrown the Library. There are insufficient resources – materials, technological resources, space – to meet the needs of the current-size community.

## **COMMUNITY INPUT: ONSITE VISITS**

The Consultant conducted two visits to Madison Public Library. The purpose of the initial visit (October 21-23, 2013) was to meet with staff, elected officials and key stakeholders; and to tour the Library and observe it being used by both the public and by staff. During the second visit (November 13-15, 2013), the Consultant met with a second group of key stakeholders and with Mayor Trulock; and facilitated a town hall meeting with Madison residents

The Consultant's observations follow.

## Library Exterior

While the Library has some vertical volume, it cannot be seen from the nearest main road (Hughes Road). Seen from the street directly in front of the building, it is a handsome and well-maintained facility. Parking appears to be sufficient during most hours of operation; however, the Consultant did receive some comments about insufficient parking. Given the demographic projections for Madison, the City may want to consider seven (7) parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of library space for the renovation. Portions of the parking lot are darker than is comfortable after sundown.

There is a large and lovely children's garden which is accessible from the children's area inside the Library. Maintained by volunteers with private funds, it is well loved and appears to be well used. The beautiful, wooded site would accommodate similar spaces for other library patrons without adding significantly to the cost of the project.

## Library Interior

There are three general problem areas with the library interior: insufficient space for the public; insufficient work space, including storage, for the staff; and inefficient workflow, particularly in the circulation area.

While much of the public space is pleasant and there are nice views of the woods behind the building and some natural light, it is too small for the size of the current community. The most problematic area – and the one mentioned by most of the individuals with whom the Consultant met – is meeting space. The Library has just one meeting room, which is sufficient for a medium-size group. There are no spaces appropriate for tutoring or small group study. There is not a separate space for children's programs. In addition, the Consultant was told numerous times that there is no space for presentations by local performing arts groups; and that Madison Library would be the logical space for an auditorium with a performance space.

All public areas of the library are too small – adult, teens and children's. The design of the Library and the current allocation of space result in a lack of quiet space for any of those age groups during many times of the day.

Lack of space is also the reason for a collection that is, generally speaking, too small for the size of the community. While the non-fiction collection may not need to increase dramatically in the renovated facility, the audiovisual collection (DVDs and music CDs) is in great demand and is already too small. (It is just 13% of the collection, but accounts for 25% of the circulation.) Collection and circulation figures need to be studied for other areas of disparity.

The children's collection is organized efficiently and in a way that works well for the public. Picture books are face out in bins in rough alphabetical order by the author's last name; beginning readers are on shelves and are also in rough alphabetical order. A large, castle-like

structure provides a clear signal that this is the children's area; however, it is dated, takes up valuable floor space, and creates large blind spots.

The collection is arranged in a traditional manner; i.e. by Dewey call numbers. This community may welcome a topic arrangement – similar to a retail bookstore – or a hybrid of Dewey and topic. Should a decision be made to move in that direction, the Library needs to be prepared for a dramatic increase in circulation.

There is also insufficient technology for this community. There are not enough computers with Internet access in all areas of the library (i.e. adult, teen and children's); there are few electrical outlets for patrons who bring in their laptops; and there are no scanners or fax machines for public use. The only printer for public computers is located behind the circulation desk. Audiovisual equipment is insufficient to support meeting room use.

There is almost no work space for library staff. The children's librarians share a former closet; the room also serves as storage space for programming materials. There is not a telephone in the children's office. Adult services staff have no back-of-house work space and, therefore, do their work at a public desk. While there is a separate room for Friends of the Library used books for sale, they have no storage space for book donations. During the Consultant's visit, boxes of donated materials were stacked up next to the Friends' room, which is adjacent to the circulation desk. Lack of storage space has led to use of the branch manager's office for that purpose.

There is a circulation workroom. However, it is small and noisy and is inefficiently laid out for current materials-handling processes.

The circulation and reference desks (one in children's, one in the adult area) and the circulation workroom which is situated between them take up prime public space in the center of the library. As a result, the adult reference desk faces the back of the building and cannot be seen from the library entrance. And while every other public and staff space in the building is too small, the two public service desks are too large. Based on the design for the renovated library, the reference function could be accomplished with a small workstation and/or by librarians roving with hand-held devices, though the Library may still want a small desk in the children's area. A circulation desk with space for two staff may be sufficient if customers are able to easily pay fines online, at an in-house kiosk or at the self-checkout machines.

Materials are returned either at an outside book drop, which has to be emptied several times a day, or at the circulation desk. Materials are discharged (checked in) at the circulation desk or in the circulation workroom. As a result, there is a lot of movement behind the desk that is not directly related to public service. It is recommended that the circulation workroom in the new library be located at the front of the building with book return slots going directly into that space and onto an automated materials handling system.

Checkout is currently self-service with several machines available for public use. However, it appears that library system circulation policies result in interruptions in the checkout process, thereby hindering optimal usage of the self-checkout machines.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Madison Public Library is clearly well used and well loved by its community. A very large percentage of the community, almost 85%, has library cards and regularly uses them. That community, however, has outgrown the current library. Collections, spaces and technology are insufficient to meet the demands of the fast-growing area. Areas for the public to study, meet in small groups and enjoy a performance are in particularly-high demand as they are not available elsewhere in the community.

Lack of space and appropriate technologies also contribute to inefficient workflow for staff. In addition, some functions – material check-in, for example – need to be relocated to improve efficiency and to keep back-of-house tasks out of the public space. Public service points are too large, are not well placed, and hinder the ability of staff to connect with the Library’s users.

The staff, elected officials and key stakeholders uniformly expressed a desire and support for a 21<sup>st</sup> century public library space – a community center and gathering place that could meet the needs of residents for many years to come. Beyond a larger collection, there is a stated need for faster and more-advanced technology; for meeting and performance space; and for sufficient seating and space to simply enjoy time in the Library.

The Library is sited on a large plot of land that would easily accommodate an updated and expanded facility. The Consultant recommends that the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library move forward as soon as possible to give the community the public library it desires.